

NOAA DIVING SAFETY BULLETIN #79-1

MEMORANDUM FOR: ALL NOAA DIVERS

FROM: J. Morgan Wells  
NOAA Diving Coordinator

SUBJECT: 1. Unsafe Practice  
2. Recommended Regulations Change  
3. Recommended Regulations Change  
4. Definition of a "Dive"  
5. Recommended Regulations Change

THE NOAA DIVING SAFETY BOARD HAS DIRECTED THE NOAA DIVING COORDINATOR TO ISSUE "DIVING SAFETY BULLETINS" AT SUCH TIMES AS HE SHALL DEEM NECESSARY TO RAPIDLY ADVISE ALL NOAA DIVERS OF IMPORTANT MATTERS WHICH RELATE TO DIVING SAFETY. He shall also advise upon changes in operating policies and procedures, recommended by the Safety Board, in advance of formal Regulation changes, and shall promulgate changes in administrative policies and procedures when necessary.

1. UNSAFE PRACTICE

The NOAA Diving Regulations - Safety Rule #14c - require each diver to wear an "adequate inflatable vest or other flotation device" while diving. Variable-volume suits (such as Unisuits and Viking Suits) provide a diver with adequate flotation and a means of fine buoyancy control. However, the Safety Board has determined that, where power inflation and exhaust valves/controls for these suits are located upon the chest, the use of an additional front-mounted buoyancy compensator is an unsafe practice.

2. RECOMMENDED REGULATION CHANGE

The Safety Board has commenced efforts to develop NOAA guidelines and standards for "Exposure Suits and Compensating Systems". The results of these efforts will be an integral part of a recommended change to the Equipment Section of the NOAA Diving Safety Rules which will establish a new policy regarding variable volume suits.

For approval to use variable volume suits, any NOAA Diver must have:

- a. satisfactorily completed a minimum of three hours of training in the use of these suits

(two hours of which must have been in open water) from qualified persons designated by the NOAA Diving Coordinator; or equivalent prior experience verified by a qualified NOAA Unit Diving Officer.

- b. Demonstrated proficiency in use of such suits through a checkout dive with a qualified NOAA Unit Diving Officer or his designee.

### 3. RECOMMENDED REGULATIONS CHANGE

The Safety Board has recommended a change in operating procedures for the Scuba Diving Teams, Section 4(b)(2), as follows:

Scuba Diving Teams: Except under emergency conditions, the buddy System of at least two (2) divers will always be required. WHEN CONDITIONS ARE SUCH THAT THE PROBABILITY OF SEPARATION IS HIGH, SUCH AS LOW VISIBILITY, SOME FORM OF DIRECT CONTACT (PHYSICAL OR VISUAL) BETWEEN DIVERS SHALL BE MAINTAINED. TRAINEES WILL AT ALL TIMES BE WITHIN PHYSICAL OR VISUAL DISTANCE FROM OTHER QUALIFIED MEMBERS OF THE DIVE TEAM SUCH THAT ASSISTANCE MAY BE EASILY RENDERED IN THE EVENT THAT TROUBLE OCCURS. In the event that diving is shallow with a restricted area, with water conditions of low velocity and turbidity, the buddy diver may remain at the surface fully equipped, maintaining contact with the working diver at all times. A surface attendant shall be present in the immediate area any time diving conditions require it.

### 4. DEFINITION OF A "DIVE"

For purposes of the NOAA Diving Regulations and as a matter of official policy, the Safety Board has approved the following definition of a "Dive".

A dive is that time and activity spend on and beneath the Surface of the water by a person equipped with diving gear. A dive is completed when the diver (a) leaves the water, or (b) returns to the surface and then resubmerges to perform a different activity. During initial training, no more than one dive will be credited for each cylinder of air used.

### 5. RECOMMENDED REGULATIONS CHANGES

The Safety Board has recommended a new Diving Safety Rule which will be incorporated into the Regulations.

14j. Emergency Oxygen Resuscitator. An emergency oxygen resuscitator, capable of ventilating a non-breathing person, shall be at each dive site. Divers (and diver support personnel) shall be trained in the use of this equipment.

The requirement for oxygen resuscitators at each dive site has been a mandatory imposed by the Diving Coordinator in the past several months.